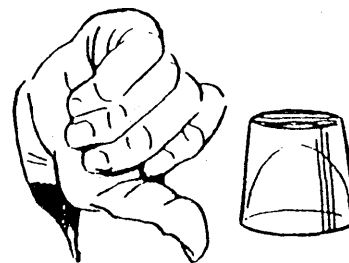


# Alcohol: Token Moderation or Total Abstinence?

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## Introduction

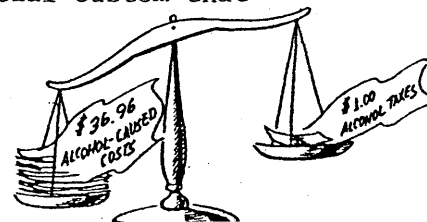
The most destructive drug in general use today is alcohol. Addiction to narcotics is not nearly as prevalent as addiction to alcohol. Alcoholism is our nation's number-one health problem, and it is getting worse. Researchers at George Washington University say that there are probably nine million alcoholics in America and many millions more on the verge of a serious drinking problem. The World Health Organization says the United States has the highest rate of alcoholism in the world. American industry alone loses an estimated \$2 billion a year from the effects of alcohol. The cost of crime spawned by alcohol is astronomically high. The helpful missions news sheet, The Church Around the World, summarizes the staggering statistics:

The alcohol industry pays \$8 billion a year in taxes, according to a recent estimate. But, employees who fail to show up for work because of hangovers cost industry \$9 billion, doctor bills due to drinking are \$8 billion, and car accidents with liquor involved cost \$6.5 billion; a total of \$24 billion. Nevertheless, per capita consumption of alcohol in the U.S. increased 24 percent in the last decade. Washington, D.C., residents drink more than anyone else; Nevada is second. Arkansas is the "driest" state. (June, 1975, Vol. 5, No. 7, p. 1)

The most appalling effect is the great loss of innocent life. Alcohol is a causal factor in some 25,000 traffic deaths and 200,000 injuries each year. Forty-four percent of all drivers at fault in two-car accidents are legally drunk. One driver out of every fifty, according to a recent U.S. Department of Transportation study, is drunk (Christianity Today, Nov. 6, 1970, p. 28).

Time speaks of a revolution in the public attitude toward alcohol:

"the country is learning to accept its drinking habit as a social custom that



is as ineradicable as it is harmless when practiced in moderation" (Time, Dec. 29, 1967, p. 15). Alcoholism, once recognized as sin, is now termed a sickness.

Even churches which once stood resolutely for total abstinence are gradually reversing their position. The National Council of Churches lent its force to the lowering of the legal drinking age from 21 to 18. Methodists, who long practiced or avowed total abstinence, now freely discuss the merits of appropriate and inappropriate drinking. In evangelical circles social drinking is readily acceptable where total abstinence was urged and preached in recent years.

In light of the enormous problems posed by the curse of alcohol and the lack of effective preaching on the Christian and his relationship to alcohol, it is necessary to consider certain ethical principles relating to the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

1A. The Prevailing Error:

Most individuals arguing for social drinking on the basis of the apparent consumption of alcoholic beverages in Bible times make one supreme error. They assume that alcoholic beverages in Bible times were very similar to those of today. Nothing could be further from the truth. As John MacArthur points out, biblical wine was sub-alcoholic by contemporary standards.

*John MacArthur, Jr.*

*Living  
in the  
Spirit  
A Book at  
Wine, the Word and Song  
Ephesians 5:18-20*

★ How do the alcoholic drinks of today compare to those of biblical times?

According to the Alcohol Council Information Center: Beer has 4% alcohol, wine has 9-11% alcohol, brandy, has 15-20% alcohol, and liquor has 40-50% alcohol (80-100 proof). Now, since anybody in biblical times who drank unmixed wine (9-11% alcohol) was definitely considered a barbarian, then we don't even need to discuss whether or not a Christian should drink hard liquor — that is apparent! But what was the alcoholic content of the wine that they drank? Taking the lowest mixture that was acceptable, which was 3:1 (to say nothing of the 5:1, 10:1, 15:1, etc.) combined with the 9-11% alcoholic wine, we come up with a final alcoholic content of 2.25-2.75%. Now that's very low. In fact, by today's standards something has to be 3.2% alcohol to be classified as an alcoholic beverage. So the wine that they consumed in those days was either completely non-alcoholic (being mixed from a syrup or paste) or was sub-alcoholic according to today's standards. This is why the Bible says that elders in the church are not to linger long beside wine (1 Tim. 3:3); because with such a low alcoholic content, it would take a long time to get drunk.

The Methodist Church reasserts its fundamental concern with the problems of alcohol and the conviction that its members should abstain from all use of alcoholic beverages. The use of beverage alcohol in our highly organized and mechanized society denies the abundant life, creating havoc and misery in the lives of millions. Alcoholism alone, with its five million victims has become the nation's third largest health problem. The use of alcohol causes men to harm their neighbors, both by deed and by example. Feeding a pattern of guilty involvement and callous rationalization, it separates man from God. Therefore, the Church continues its unceasing battle against intoxicating beverages. □ Thus Methodists are called by love not only to abstain, but also to seek healing and justice for the neighbor who is victimized. Concern for the alcoholic for all those in trouble because of beverage alcohol is the clear mandate of the Christian faith.

—From the *Discipline of The Methodist Church*

So the answer to the first question in the Christian's Wine List, "Is drinking wine today, the same as in Bible times?" NO!

2A. The Personal Risk:

Quite apart from the biblical and practical argument against alcoholic beverages, there is a compelling logical reason. There is no way of knowing who among any group that begins to drink will eventually become an alcoholic. No medical or psychological research can predict the victims of alcoholism. It is a well known fact that one out of every ten persons taking the first drink becomes an alcoholic.

**1 Out Of 10 Drinkers  
Are Alcoholics,  
AMA Says**

The American Medical Association says 1 out of every 10 drinkers becomes an alcoholic. The AMA said there are more than five million alcoholics in the United States.

The only way for alcoholics to achieve control is complete abstinence, the report said.

Regarding the spread of alcoholism the AMA in its bulletin (MH-9) said, "many alcoholic patients give a history of parents drinking excessively; people use alcohol as an escape; youngsters usually imitate adults, drinking makes them feel grown up; children often do what their parents do rather than what they say."

Someone has put it this way. Suppose someone goes to an airline counter to book a flight. The ticket is purchased and the attendant delivers it with these words: "You should know, sir, that on this plane, seating one hundred passengers, ten seats sometime during the flight will suddenly give way and drop their occupants out of the plane." The purchaser replies, "Don't put me in one of those seats." "But," says the attendant, "that is impossible; we don't know the seats that will give way. Have a good flight, sir."

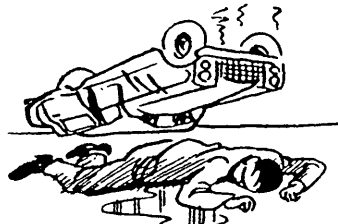
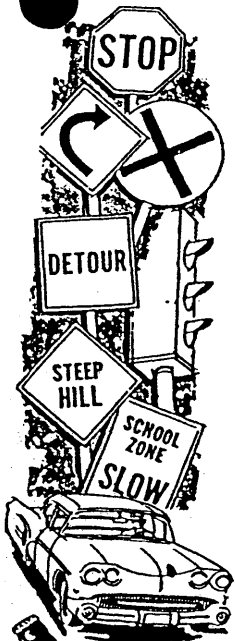
People must be informed that the use of alcohol is not unlike Russian roulette: every tenth person becomes automatically hooked. The only solution is total abstinence. Christianity Today, April 24, 1964, p. 25.

3A. The Social Harm:

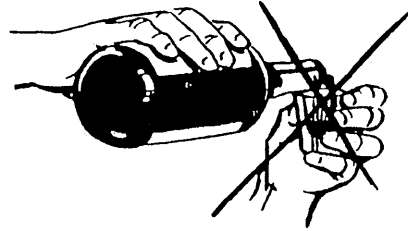
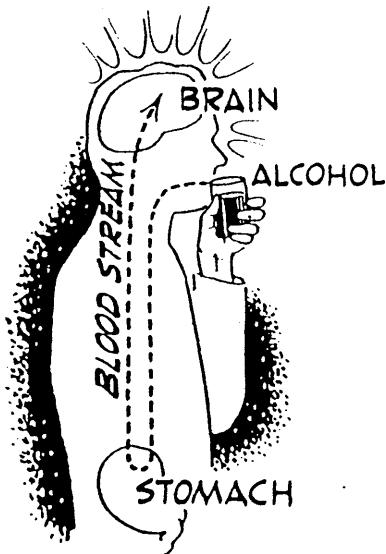
Youth especially needs to be told that drinking is a gamble. The stakes are very high, involving personal disaster that might involve loss of work, marriage, children, friends, self-respect, and, if not checked, life itself.

At least 50% of all accident related deaths are directly attributable to alcohol.

The stresses of living in this space age make the human organism more susceptible to the perils of alcohol than in ancient Palestine. The driver of an oxcart or the traveler by horse or donkey faced different demands for instant decision than the man at the wheel of over a ton of metal propelled by a multi-horsepower engine. God expects of us the adjustment of maturity to current problems and holds us responsible for indulgences that may imperil our own lives and the lives of others. In a day like this, voluntary abstinence to the glory of



God and for the sake of others is a reasonable and safe solution to the problem of alcohol. Christianity Today, April 24, 1964, p. 25.



Taken as a beverage it passes directly from the stomach and small intestine into the blood. The amount of food in the stomach slows down the rapidity of this absorption. The effects of alcohol on the individual occur more quickly when the drinker has an empty stomach.

On absorption into the blood, alcohol is distributed to all parts of the body, including the tissue fluids, where it remains until all taken in is oxidized or discharged from the body in the breath or urine.

**No  
Neutral  
Spirits  
Here**

4 A. A Poor Example:

A great biblical principle applicable to the problem is consideration for the weaker brother. The classic passage is Romans 14:13-21

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more. One man hath faith to eat all things, but he that is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth set at naught him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth. . . Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock in his brother's way. . . I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself; save that to him who accounteth anything to be unclean. For if



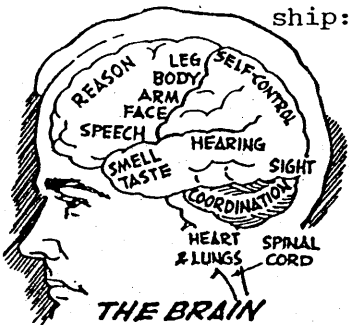
because of meat thy brother is grieved, thou walkest no longer in love. . . Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God. . . It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth."

In our church circles it is readily recognized that alcoholic beverages are strictly taboo (as seen for example in almost all Baptist Church Covenants: "to abstain from the use of intoxicating drink as a beverage"). Thus for any church member to partake would be offensive to many, therefore total abstinence in our circles is required. Adrian Jeffers, The Western Commentator, July - August 1975, "Wine in the Bible: Weal or Woe?" p. 7.

A special problem prevented by total abstinence is that posed by the presence in our churches of saved alcoholics. Having been delivered from the curse of alcoholism, they need strong examples of abstinence. The use of fermented wine at the communion service would prove an irresistible temptation for them. Further, those who do resist the temptation would be kept from observing the blessed Lord's Supper, one of the two church ordinances, commanded for every believer by the resurrected Lord.

5 A. The Physical Danger:

Another argument for abstinence is the physical danger posed by alcohol to the human body. The effects on the brain, as well as damage to the liver and most other organs have been graphically presented in recent publications. Albert Maisel summarizes current scholarship:



The first effect then of alcohol on the brain is to dull the capacity for self-criticism and sense of caution. This is followed by a lessening of care and anxiety. The sense of humor is dulled. The checks on irresponsible and unreasonable behavior are also dulled. Action follows impulse. There is emotional spontaneity; reaction time is slower; coordinations are dis-

Until quite recently, almost all researchers believed that such occasional imbibers suffered no permanent ill effects from their drinking. Physiologists were convinced that even when such moderate drinkers did get "high," their slurred speech and slowed-up reactions evidenced only a transitory effect upon their brains and nervous systems. Now, however, strong evidence indicates that there is no guarantee of a "safe" level of drinking, no absolute threshold below which alcohol fails to damage or destroy groups of cells in the brain and other vital organs. Reader's Digest, June 1970, "Alcohol and Your Brain" p. 65.

Maisel goes on to show that the consumption of even the smallest amount of alcohol irreparably destroys brain cells. This abuse of the body is forbidden in the Scriptures which reminds us

that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

An article, "What Alcohol Does To Your Body" in Good Housekeeping (September 1981, p. 231-232), summarizes the harmful consequences of the consumption of even the smallest quantity of alcoholic beverages:

Even in moderate amounts alcohol has a noticeable effects on the body. Because it enters the blood stream it touches almost every organ, and its effects on feelings and behavior are well known.

It appears that over the centuries, the human body has deteriorated because of sin and is evermore susceptible to disease and to addiction. This is especially true in the area of alcoholism. It seems that people are more addicted to alcohol now than in any stage of human history. Involved here is the principle of human retrogression because of the debilitating effects of sin.

Alcohol is distributed in almost equal concentration to all parts of the body. In the central nervous system, the brain areas concerned with inhibition, memory and sensation are most strongly influenced by alcohol. The inhibitory centers of the brain, lying posterior to the central fissure of that organ, are depressed. The depression of those centers about which the behavior pattern of civilized man has been established, liberates a freer play of fundamental instincts such as anger, fear, ambition, and sexual urge. When these motivating forces manifest themselves uninhibited, the individual appears to be stimulated, hence the misconception has developed that alcohol is a stimulant. (Dr. John C. Krantz, Jr., Sc.D., "Alcohol and the Human Body" Pub. General Board of Christian Social Concerns of the Methodist Church, 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, D.C.)

6A. Personal Enslavement:

Alcohol as a drug is habit forming. It enslaves and therefore is wrong. Paul laid down the principle on enslavement in 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV):

"Everything is permissible for me"--but not everything is beneficial.

"Everything is permissible for me"--but I will not be mastered by anything.

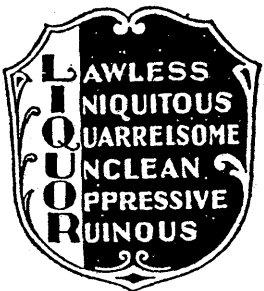
It is wrong to be bound by a habit, no matter what it is.

It is even worse to be bound by a habit which ruins ones personal health and destroys ones relationship to family and friends.

7A. Present Associations:

Whatever the cultural situation in the Old and New Testament times might have been, in our time alcohol has ungodly associations with bars, nightclubs, skid row and immorality. A century ago, even Robert Ingersoll, the infidel (1833-1899) railed against the evils of liquor with great eloquence in the Chicago Tribune:

"I am sure that there is a prejudice against any man who manufactures alcohol. I believe that from the time it issues from the coiled and poisonous worm in the distillery until it empties in to the jaws of death, dishonor and crime, it demoralizes EVERYBODY THAT TOUCHES IT, from its source to where it ends. I do not believe anybody can contemplate the object without being prejudiced against the liquor crime. All we have to do, gentlemen, is to think of the wrecks on either bank of the stream of death, of the suicides, of the insanity, of the ignorance, of the destitution, of the little children tugging at the breasts of weeping and despairing mothers, of wives asking for bread, of the men of genius it has wrecked, the men struggling with imaginary serpents produced by this devilish thing, and when you think of the jails, of almshouses, of the asylums, of the prisons, of the scaffolds upon either bank, I do not wonder that every THOUGHTFUL MAN IS PREJUDICED AGAINST THIS DAMNED STUFF CALLED ALCOHOL. Intemperance cuts down youth in its vigor, manhood in its strength, old age in its weakness. It breaks the father's heart, bereaves the doting mother, extinguishes natural affection, erases conjugal love, blots out filial attachment, blights



Educational Temperance Shield.

parental hopes, brings down mourning age in sorrow to the grave. It produces wives widows; children orphans; fathers fiends, and all of them paupers and beggars." ("What Great Men Have Said About Alcohol," Calvary Crusade, Columbus, GA, p. 3-4)

8A. Positive Pictures of Abstinence:

The Scriptures afford two examples of groups who practiced voluntary total abstinence. The Nazirites (Numbers 6:3-4); Amos 2:12) and the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35:1-11) refused to drink wine. The biblical narratives strongly imply that theirs was a commendable decision.

The fact that there are hazards of health even in the most moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages, that drunkenness is in all cases a sin, and that voluntary abstinence is a commendable action, added to the fact that our complex society has given rise to problems which are not within the horizon of New Testament writers, making the drink question far more acute and complex in modern times--all this makes voluntary abstinence from all intoxicants a biblically tenable, preferable and required position.



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DES MOINES TRIBUNE  
TUE, JUNE 27, 1980

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#### POSITION ON SOCIAL DRINKING:

As an institution and as individual faculty, administration, and board members, we affirm our strong conviction that it is Biblically wrong for a Christian to use alcoholic beverages today. We stand completely agreed in our rejection of moderate and social drinking, and we are united in our acceptance of total abstinence. This position is mandated by the board, supported by the administration and taught in the classroom.

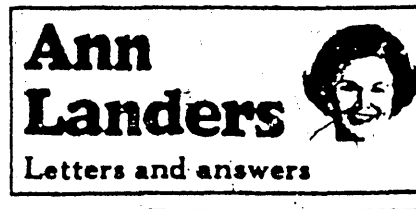
Faith Baptist Bible College realizes that there is a legitimate need to demonstrate a Biblical basis for this position of total abstinence. Often the people of God have developed strong convictions out of a deep love for the Saviour and a genuine desire to see His people living consistently for Him. But, when the Biblical basis behind these positions is not clearly articulated and emphasized, the believer's practice often becomes based upon tradition and what is socially acceptable. Therefore, we gladly state the following Biblical reasons for our position of total abstinence:

- (1) Drunkenness and alcohol dependence are clearly condemned in Scripture. Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 5:11; I Corinthians 6:9-11. It is a well established fact that moderate and social drinking have led many into such a condition. To open the door to this is worse than playing with fire!
- (2) Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 6:19. We are commanded in Scripture not to allow alcohol to control us, but, rather to allow the Holy Spirit to be in control. Ephesians 5:18. The point at which alcohol controls an individual is, at best, unclear and militates in favor of total abstinence.
- (3) Alcohol has been the source for countless numbers of families being ruined and lives being lost. It has been identified with the crowd that cares not for the things of God. Scripture warns us to identify with that which edifies and will lead men to God and to shun that which does not. I Thessalonians 5:21,22; Ephesians 4:17, 19-24; Romans 12:9.
- (4) We are not to allow anything - including the issue of alcohol - to dim our testimony for Christ, bring anyone to question the reality of our Christianity, or cause others to stumble in their walk with the Lord. Philippians 2:15,16; Romans 14:21; I Timothy 4:12,15.

While we allow liberty in interpreting specific passages of Scripture which mention wine, we emphatically reject any teaching which allows for or condones the drinking of alcoholic beverages by Christians today. Again we state:

WE BELIEVE, TEACH, AND PRACTICE TOTAL ABSTINENCE AS THE ONLY PROPER RESPONSE FOR CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN LIVING TODAY.

Adopted by the Board of Trustees of Faith Baptist Bible College - 1-12-82.

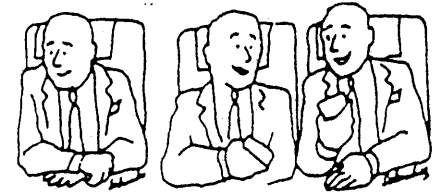
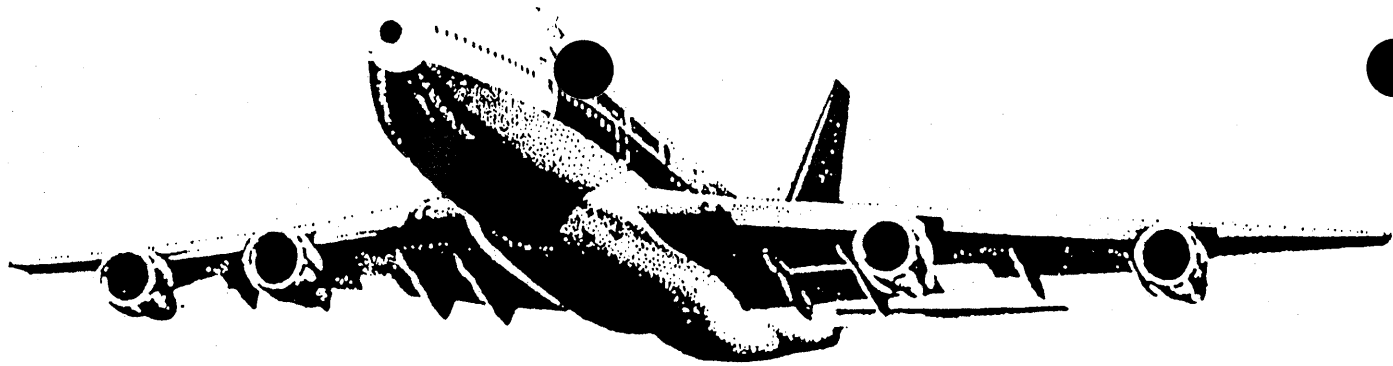


**DEAR ANN LANDERS:** We are hearing a great deal about the "disease" called alcoholism these days. Do you have the guts to print this?

**If alcoholism is a disease, it's the only disease that is bottled and sold.**  
**It is the only disease that requires a license to keep it going.**  
**It is the only disease contracted by the will of man.**  
**It is the only disease that produces revenue for the government.**  
**It is the only disease that provokes crime.**  
**It is the only disease that is habit-forming.**  
**It is also the only disease that causes violent death on the highways.**  
**It is the only disease spread by advertising.**  
**And the only disease not caused by a germ or a virus.**  
**Can it be that it is not a disease at all?**

— I'm from the  
Show-Me State

Ann says: The experts whose opinions I respect say alcoholism IS a disease. But you raise some interesting questions. Thanks for writing.



Taking your first drink is as hazardous as taking a plane where during the flight every 10<sup>th</sup> seat drops out. Every 10<sup>th</sup> person who takes a drink eventually becomes an alcoholic!

